

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-19. (Canceled)

20. (Currently Amended) An encoding device, comprising:

means for encoding an input image signal to generate a bitstream;

means for generating buffer characteristics information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the buffer characteristics information includes an input bit rate for a decoder buffer and a size of the decoder buffer for use during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer are used as criteria to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device according to a combination between the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer; and

means for multiplexing the bitstream and the buffer characteristics information.

21. (Currently Amended) The encoding device according to claim [[1]] 20, wherein

the combination between the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer is used as a determining criterion to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at the decoding device.

22. (Currently Amended) The encoding device according to claim [[2]] 21, wherein

the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer are used to generate a characteristics curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at the decoding device.

23. (Currently Amended) The encoding device according to claim [[1]] 20, wherein the buffer characteristics information contains a delay amount, and the input bit rate, the size of the decoder buffer, and the delay amount are used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at the decoding device.

24. (Currently Amended) The encoding device according to claim [[4]] 23, wherein the input bit rate, the size of the decoder buffer, and the delay amount are used to generate a characteristics curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at the decoding device.

25. (Currently Amended) The encoding device according to claim [[1]] 20, wherein the buffer characteristics information includes a minimum bit rate, a minimum decoder buffer size, and a minimum delay amount, which are used to generate a characteristic curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at the decoding device.

26. (Currently Amended) An encoding method, comprising:  
encoding an input signal to generate a bitstream;  
generating buffer characteristics information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the buffer characteristics information includes an input bit rate for a decoder buffer and a size of the decoder buffer for use during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer are used as criteria to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device according to a combination between the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer; and  
multiplexing the bitstream and the buffer characteristics information.

27. (Currently Amended) An encoding device, comprising:

an image information encoder configured to encode an input image signal to generate a bitstream;

a bitstream analyzing unit configured to generate buffer characteristics information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the buffer characteristics information includes an input bit rate for a decoder buffer and a size of the decoder buffer for use during decoding of the bitstream, wherein the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer are used as criteria to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device according to a combination between the input bit rate and the size of the decoder buffer; and

a multiplexer configured to multiplex the bitstream and the buffer characteristic information.